

# Eye Witness Account of the Battle of Ramsour's Mill

By Wallace M. Reinhardt

EDITOR'S NOTE: Wallace M. Reinhardt was born in 1818; when he was a 12 year old boy many of the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Ramsour's Mill were still living, their ages being from 70 to 75 years old. When Reinhardt was a lad of 17, in 1835, a few of these survivors of the famous fight were yet alive and their memories active and fresh. Young Reinhardt wandered over the battlefield many times with these leading characters in the great drama and he got from them this first-hand account of the outstanding incident which occurred on the memorable day of June 20th, 1780.

Reinhardt jotted down notes of what he was told and in later life prepared a manuscript of same from which the following is taken verbatim.

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Colonel Tory John Moore<sup>6</sup> then had about 1100 men, but as stated before, those who had been sent out to help the harvesters gathered their crops did not all return when called in by Colonel Moore to take part in the fight which was anticipated. Only about fifty came in, and this gave Moore a force of something over 900 men; the greater part were well drilled and they were brave men of good character, from the best citizenship of this section. They were acting according to the best dictates of their consciences, believed that they were standing for right and justice.

After his interview with Christian Reinhardt Adam Reep managed to see his wife and give her instructions what to do when the battle took place; he told her to stay close at home, and prepare food for "Aunt Betsy" (Mrs. Christian Reinhardt) and her children, who would probably come to Reep's cabin for safety. Reep then saw his two brothers, Rudolph and Michal, and started them after other patriots, with orders to meet him about midnight of the 19th, at Ramsey's Ford. He saw several more of his friends and neighbors and gave them similar instructions.

Waiting at Ramsey's Ford on the night of June 19th, 1780, Adam Reep was joined by thirty good men. He examined their arms and found that the guns were all in good order except that of a young lad, whose old shattered musket did not suit Reep. Reep told this lad that he would get him a better musket when they met Colonel Locke. After this careful inspection of arms and ammunition they all mounted their horses, crossed the river and came out over the hills to the east.

This scouting around through bushes and thickets would have lost any one else but this was Adam's hunting grounds and he soon reached the Tuckesegee War Trail, the road that General Rutherford<sup>7</sup> was to travel. Shortly after entering this trail the sound of approaching horsemen was heard. Forming his men on each side he waited and in a few minutes two soldiers were captured. Reep knew these two men, they were from the

neighborhood of Alexander Moore and his brother, Colonel John Moore (Patriot John). The former was in Rutherford's army, but was at home when these neighbors passed by, shouting for King George. Alexander Moore went back to Rutherford's force early in the morning -- before daylight -- and informed Rutherford of the occurrence, who then began to get ready to march. Alexander Moore was at home for the night only, and always in after years said that General Rutherford was too slow; said that he was a good man and a brave officer but never moved in a hurry. He was only 16 miles from the enemy; commenced his march just after sunrise and reached his infantry at 12 o'clock, cavalry a little in advance, perhaps half an hour earlier. This was near an hour after the defeat and retreat of the enemy. Colonel Lock<sup>8</sup> had sent an express for him which hastened him up. Colonel Locke was too much cut up to follow up his dear-bought victory. but, again to our story.

Reep led his men skillfully around the enemy and was in the main road, about two miles from the battlefield, awaiting the arrival of Col. Locke. Shortly after daylight Locke's advance came up. Colonel Locke had crossed the river with near 400 men and was met by McDowell<sup>9</sup> and Major Rutherford with 150 men on the west bank of the Catawba river; there a few men fell in from along the river and on meeting Reep had a force of over 500. Colonel Locke soon found out all about the positions of the enemy through Reep; their number, location, etc. Reep's men mingled among Locke's troops were repeatedly asked of the Tories were brave enough to fight well; the answer from all was, "They will fight." Colonel Locke told Reep that as he was so well posted as to the grounds and positions of the enemy he should command his thirty men and use or move them as he like -- "For I know you are an experienced scout." This was a great compliment and, as Reep said afterwards, almost brought tears from him.

Moving along steadily, Reep remarked to Colonel Locke, "You are now within one mile of the enemy," and the column was halted. Some 8 or 10 more soldiers here came in. Colonel Lock then gathered his officers about him and said:

"Captain Falls will continue on this road, as it runs across the hill to the Mill, and move up to within three- or four hundred yards of the enemy (who were on top of the hill) halt, and wait until the main body is near enough to commence the attack from the south side. Captain Dobson will march over towards the creek and into Green's road, (a road laid off by an English surveyor of that name) and will attack the enemy from that direction. Not a gun is to be fired until all are ready; the attack must be simultaneous."

Then riding out in front of the men, Colonel Locke took off his hat and told his soldiers how important it was that they should defeat the enemy. He said that he believed the enemy would put up a good fight, that many good men had joined them, being deluded. "We must have victory," he said, then told his men that general Rutherford would most certainly be with them with his force, although there was yet no news from him. Couriers had been sent to him. (It was afterwards found out that these couriers never reached General Rutherford).

Colonel Locke then spoke further to his men and told them that if there was a single

man among them that did not want to go into the fight he could retire. When the order to march was given one hundred men stood still and refused to march. This was a great surprise to Colonel Locke, who again talked to them in a very touching manner. McDowell and Rutherford made short speeches. One was very severe, called these men cowards; this came near running all, but a stout old man, a private soldier, whose name is lost -- perhaps it was Ellis -- pulled off his hat and spoke very feelingly to the hesitating men. He spoke of their wives and children, how they would be disgraced in after years, which brought tears to many. Again the order to march was given and all moved off except for one hundred infantry, who stood still. They consulted a few moments, then throwing up their hats with a shout, moved off and joined the advance.

Coming to a trail, called by Reep "the little Indian trail," Locke here diverged from the main road, marching single file along this narrow trail until they entered a large trail which led through the chinquapin bushes -- now the eastern end of the village of Lincolnton -- direct to Henry Dellinger's Ordinary, or Tavern. This being about a half mile south of the enemy's position. Here Colonel Locke called for refreshments, the troops rested a little while, for they had marched about eight miles that morning, in good time, and needed a rest.

Colonel Locke was rather disposed to linger, or tarry, a short time here expecting the arrival of General Rutherford's forces, but all at once firing was heard from the east side of the enemy's position; a picket thrown out by the enemy had fired upon Fall's advance and fled back to their main line. This was returned by Falls, who dashing up near the felled trees, was shot. Captain Falls turned his horse and rode back to a persimmon glade where he dropped from his horse, dead. Two soldiers placed his body under some bushes and returned to the fight. Falls' men then dismounted, let their horses go loose, and formed just in rear of the enemy's lines, in the woods, and commenced an incessant firing upon them. Taking advantage of shelter of the trees they soon drove the enemy back to their main line. Major McDowell was in command.

Colonel Locke, in the meantime, hurried from the Ordinary. Captain Dodson marched his hundred men over towards the creek, got into Green's road, and on nearing the hill upon which the enemy were posted -- the south side of the west end, where Christian Reinhardt's dwelling house stood -- the enemy opened fire upon him and fell back to their main line. Dobson then joined Colonel Locke and a line of two ranks was formed, just at the foot of the hill, across the road and small branch. The ascent to the hill was considerable but Locke slowly advanced, not to tire his men. This was about 7 o'clock in the morning. A very heavy mist, of fog, had spread over the hill from the mill pond. The fog was so thick and heavy that it was impossible for the combatants to see each other until almost meeting.

The enemy, being in the road cut, were kneeling down; they discovered the Whigs<sup>10</sup> first and fired, the volley killing outright ten good men and wounding several others. Had it not been for a few trees many more would have been killed. This was a damper for the Whigs and in spite of the efforts of their officers all fell back to the foot of the hill. This chafed Colonel Locke, who formed again, and with his officers led a second

advanced steadily up the hill. As the Whigs approached the crest of the hill they could see the foe and a sharp volley rang out from both sides. The officers were in front and Captain Dobson was shot, also Captain Bowman; both died in a few moments. Colonel Locke then fell back a few paces whilst the enemy kept up firing but overshot the Whigs. After carefully reloading their rifles Locke's men were ordered to charge up to the road and then deliberately fire upon the enemy. The charge was made in good order, and the fog had begun to rise; to their utter astonishment, upon reaching the road, the Whigs found that the Tories had made a sudden flank movement, filed to their right and marched along the road to the apex, or beginning of the slope of the hill towards the bridge or Mill, (west) all done in good order and in quick time. This was cheering to the Whigs. Several Tories had been killed in their first position. But the Whig loss was greatest, three brave officers already killed and a number of good men.

There were a few large trees near the top of the hill, nearer to the Whigs than to the Tories; these scattering oaks were of some benefit as a protection against sharpshooters. As the battle progressed the fog lifted and revealed, like the rising curtain in a play, a terrible scene. There stood neighbor against neighbor, and in some instances brother against brother, shooting each other down in mortal combat.

Colonel Moore and Major Welch could scarcely be seen by the Whigs, they were obscured by the plum bushes and Captain Warlick was, in all intents and purposes, the chief commander. He ranged along the line, near to his colonel, and cheered his men and they stood firm. But finding it too much for him he ordered his roan horse (he had two splendid roans in Christian Reinhardt's stables scarily 50 yards from the line of battle) and mounting he rode along the lines like a madman talking to his men and cheering them. "Never let it be said in after years we were whipped by a handful of Whigs" cried Warlick, but all at once a great shout was heard from the Whigs -- Captain McKisic with about forty men from the Fork (South Fork river) came dashing into the fight. The Tories thought General Rutherford's forces had arrived and there were some signs of the Tory ranks breaking, but Captain Warlick again rallied them.

Colonel Locke was on foot, having dismounted and tied up his horse to a limb of a large hickory tree which stood between the two branches near the foot of the hill. He remained on foot during the entire action, passing along his lines, cheering his men and often exposing himself.

The Tories stood their ground very well in their second line. Colonel Moore and Major Welch took position on the edge of the slope, on the south side, just west of Christian Reinhardt's store, amongst a grove of plum bushes; there was a large wild locust tree in the midst of this thicket and this tree was always afterward called "Moore's Locust," for his own soldiers in after years said he hugged close to it.

Colonel Locke moved up and formed his line across the hill in front of the enemy; a portion of Captain Fall's men were added to this line, and Adam Reep, with his 29 men-- having lost one-- crept into the woods near the left end of the enemy's lines and began sharp-shooting. Reep told his men to keep a sharp lookout for officers and especially

for Captain Warlick, for he was the bravest and most dangerous officer among them.

The western slope of the hill, next to the mill dam and pond, was cleared and in cultivation. On the north side of the hill a narrow field extended nearly to the water; the main road passed the east end of this narrow cleared field, and Captain Warlick had placed some of his finest marksmen opposite this point. But they were exposed in an open field and one, then another, and another fell, for a few of Captain Fall's men who were fine marksmen had crept up in the woods on the north side of the main road and were picking them off.

Adam Reep ran up to Colonel Locke at a time when the fighting was at its worst and begged him to get back out of danger. "What shall I do with them, Reep?" said Locke. Adam replied, "Club them, Colonel, club them." Colonel Locke moved his men back a few paces, directed them to load their rifles carefully and he would order a charge. The men were instructed not to fire until near the enemy, then fire and club them with the butts of their guns. This cessation of fire and falling back of the Whigs cheered the enemy, who began to shout. Colonel Locke had ordered a brisk fire to be kept up on each flank of the enemy's lines, and a few sharpshooters were to creep up near the plum bushes and fire into them. But Colonel Moore had placed a force along that point and some of the Whigs were shot in the head as they were creeping up. Locke ordered a charge, throwing his main force on the enemy's center. The Tories gave way at the first outset for the Whigs came upon them with terrible yells and shouts. But Warlick again rallied them and the fight was renewed, officers and private soldiers all mingled together--a terrible scene.

Moore and Welch mounted their horses from behind the plum bushes and not willing to risk passing down, or along their lines, for fear of being picked off by sharpshooters, they rode behind some of Reinhardt's outhouses, then coming near the left wing of their line were just on the point of ordering a retreat; they sent a courier to Captain Warlick--but it was too late. Warlick had been charging back and forth along his lines and his men were fighting bravely, but he passed too near the edge of the woods where Falls' men and some of Reep's squad were posted. Two soldiers, said to be brothers, Sharps, (this was their name) saw their opportunity to kill this gallant officer. One said, "Stop, don't you shoot, I have a better chance," but the first had raised his rifle and a small portion of his elbow projected from behind the tree, and in an instant a ball from the enemy tipped his elbow--a mere tip, yet his arm and gun fell and the other brother fired. The fine roan charger, much fretted and covered with foam and sweat, reared up and Captain Warlick tumbled off, dead.

Moore and Welch were near the foot of the hill with about 25 men, a guard taken from the south end of their line; the courier with orders to retreat did not reach Warlick before he fell, but this was the close. The Tories fled pell mell down the hill, over the bridge, and some threw away their guns and sprang into the mill pond, several being drowned. All wanted to rush across the bridge at once. About 50 turned up the mill pond and were soon fired into the Whigs and ordered to surrender, which they did. Twenty five Whigs guarded these prisoners. The planks of the bridge were torn off and tumbled into the

water by the Whigs. The Tories formed a line across the hill opposite the mill and bridge but remained there but a short time. On hearing the shouts from Rutherford's advance about half-past 11 o'clock, they fell back to Ramsaur's house, on top of this hill, where they hung out a white sheet and sent an officer and three men to parley and ask conditions of surrender. This was only a ruse, however, as Colonel Moore immediately and hurriedly moved off with about 400 men.

While the parley was going on Colonel Locke had only 60 able men around him. Rutherford's cavalry riding up broke up the parley as they cried out, "Unconditional surrender." The parley officer and his three soldiers retired across the sleepers of the bridge and on reaching Ramsaur's house found no one. Ramsaur's family had secreted themselves in the basement of the mill during the battle. Rutherford's cavalry could not cross the bridge and by the time it was fitted up for crossing the enemy were out of reach. Moore endeavored and Welch mounted their horses from behind the plum bushes and not willing to risk passing down, or along their lines, for fear of being picked off by sharpshooters, they rode behind some of Reinhardt's outhouses, then coming near the left wing of their line were just on the point of ordering a retreat; they sent a courier to Captain Warlick-but it was too late. Warlick had been charging back and forth along his lines and his men were fighting bravely, but he passed too near the edge of the woods where Falls' men and some of Reep's squad were posted. Two soldiers, said to be brothers, Sharps, (this was their name) saw their opportunity to kill this gallant officer. One said, "Stop, don't you shoot, I have a better chance," but the first had raised his rifle and a small portion of his elbow projected from behind the tree, and in an instant a ball from the enemy tipped his elbow-a mere tip, yet his arm and gun fell and the other brother fired. The fine roan charger, much fretted and covered with foam and sweat, reared up and Captain Warlick tumbled off, dead.

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cross the bridge and by the time it was fitted up for crossing the enemy were out of reach. Moore companies were small; the officers fought side by side with the private soldiers and this accounts for so many being killed.

Other officers were Majors Wilson, McDowell and Rutherford, under command of Colonel Francis Locke, of Rowan County. The two Captains, Bowman and Dobson, who fell at the beginning of the action are buried where they fell-a brick wall encloses their remains, also the bodies of Dobson's daughter and her husband, Wallace Alexander, who died in after years. Just outside this enclosure Captain Williams (Tory), Smith and one other captain are buried, on the left or west side.

The Tory loss, as stated above, about 57. The Captains killed were Murray, Cumberland, Warlick, Williams, and Captain Martin Shuford was mortally wounded and died next day. Captain Carpenter was severely wounded. Captains Green and Whiston and Keener escaped unhurt. There were two other captains, whose names we have lost, who escaped.

There were three brothers in this action, two being Whigs and one a Tory. After the battle the two Whigs followed their Tory brother, caught him and hung him to the limb of a tree. He was taken down and buried by neighbors.

Source: Warlick, G. C. (2000). What I Know about My Ancestors. Raleigh, NC: The Landmark Project.